

# *CASE STUDY: A DILEMMA WITH A TEACHER CANDIDATE*

Rae Shelton was a third-grade teacher at Lincoln Elementary School. She enjoyed working with the culturally and racially diverse students at Lincoln and had become very knowledgeable about the school's community in her 5 years there. She was contacted by the college of education at a local university to see if she would be willing to have an education student complete field experience in her classroom. Rae agreed and, 2 weeks later when Jennifer Gugliotti arrived, the two sat down and worked out a schedule. Jennifer would visit Tuesday and Thursday mornings and Rae would have her work with students in small groups.

After a month, Rae noticed certain things about Jennifer that concerned her. Jennifer seemed to be less comfortable working with particular children in the class, specifically those from poor background or children of color. After waiting for self-correction to occur, Rae decided she needed to step in.

Rae would sit down with Jennifer regularly to give her some feedback and allow Jennifer an opportunity to ask any questions. At one of these meetings, she asked Jennifer how she felt about teaching some of the poorer students and children of color in her small groups. At first Jennifer hesitated to answer, but eventually she told Rae that she wondered whether her efforts in working with these students were going to be fruitful given the circumstances they came from and the obstacles in their lives. Initially Rae was shocked to hear this but realized that she had to respond in a way that would benefit Jennifer. Rae pointed out that "children do not select their home environment" and that a teacher's professional responsibility is not to judge students' backgrounds, but to do everything possible to help all students reach their individual potential. Jennifer nodded and sheepishly stated that one of her professors had mentioned this as well, but she still felt that some of her efforts with "these types of kids" would be wasted. However, she told Rae that she appreciated the feedback and would work on these things.

As the semester drew to a close, Rae could still sense that Jennifer wasn't totally comfortable working with all of the students. Some of the students in Jennifer's group commented to Rae that Jennifer "doesn't like us".

When Rae completed the evaluation form on Jennifer that she had to submit to the university education department, she pointed out Jennifer's strengths with the technical skills of teaching but concluded her comments by saying that "Jennifer is a highly capable young woman who did not demonstrate the proper disposition to work with diverse students, whether that is defined socioeconomically or ethnically."

## **Questions to Consider**

1. Why is it important that teachers have welcoming attitudes for all students? What are the consequences for students if they don't? What are the consequences for teachers?
2. If you had been in Rae's position, what would be your greatest concern about Jennifer's interpersonal skills and their impact on young children?
3. What do you think the college of education at the university should do with the feedback from Rae? What is their responsibility in this situation?

## **Points for Self-Reflection**

Consider your upbringing and life experiences. How has your background shaped your attitudes about religion, gender, race, language, sexuality, socioeconomics, and ability? How might these attitudes, feelings, and beliefs influence you as an educator? Where do you need to direct your own learning to become a culturally competent educator?

(Modified) Diaz, C., Pelletier, C., & Provenzo, E. Jr. (2006). *Touch The Future: Teach!*  
Pearson Education, Inc. Boston MA. (pg. 51)